TOWN OF SOMERS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION · POSITION PAPER

A Revenue Opportunity for Somers

Building a strong, viable community — and balancing our budget — while protecting the character that makes Somers home

Where we stand

Over four consecutive budget referendums, Somers voters have said no. The message has been received: residents will not accept an ever-rising property tax bill as the answer to the town's budget pressures. Those failed referendums have carried real consequences — positions eliminated, services reduced, and a community increasingly asked to do more with less.

But cutting our way to a balanced budget has limits. Each round of reductions chips away at the schools, safety, and services that make Somers a place people want to live. If the residential property tax is the only tool, the town is left with two painful choices: raise it on homeowners who have already said no, or keep cutting the services that define our quality of life. There is a third path — and it begins with naming the problem accurately.

This is a revenue problem, not only a spending problem

It is easy to frame a budget crisis as overspending. But the data on how Somers compares to its twelve Tolland County neighbors points somewhere else. Somers' budget stress is driven substantially by **where our revenue comes from** — almost entirely from residential property taxpayers — and by a taxable base that is thinner than it looks. Put simply, Somers has been asking a relatively small base of resident homeowners to fund a full-service community. That is not a sustainable model, and four referendums have made clear that residents know it.

What the county data tells us

Three findings stand out when Somers is measured against the other twelve towns of Tolland County (source: CCM Community Profiles):

> **Our homes are the most valuable in the county — our residents are not the wealthiest.** Somers has the #1 median home value in Tolland County ($379,300), yet ranks 9th of 13 in per-capita income ($48,920, below the county average). High home values paired with middle-of-the-pack incomes mean many households — seniors and young families included — feel every tax increase directly.
>
> **We are a town of homeowners.** 85.6% of Somers housing is owner-occupied — 5th-highest in the county and well above the county average. When the town needs more revenue, it comes overwhelmingly from resident homeowners, not from commercial property or absentee owners.
>
> **A large share of our property pays no tax.** 15.8% of Somers' grand list is tax-exempt — the second-highest share in the entire county, behind only Mansfield (home to UConn). A smaller-than-average taxable base carries the full weight of the budget: our taxable grand list per resident ranks just 8th of 13, below the county median — even though our homes are the most valuable.

And our tax rate is already at the county median (mill rate 30.21, 7th of 13). Somers is not a low-tax town with room to spare; it is a town that has largely run out of room on the residential side.

The core insight: an over-reliance on one revenue source

Somers' desirability is proven — the highest home values in the county do not happen by accident. But the town has not translated that desirability into a diversified tax base. With a high exempt share, a thin taxable base per resident, and near-total reliance on residential taxpayers, every new dollar the budget needs falls on homeowners. That is the machine that produces failed referendums.

The opportunity: broaden the base, not the burden

Every dollar of new commercial, retail, or light-industrial ratable value is a dollar of revenue that does not come from a Somers homeowner's tax bill. Broadening the grand list is the single most powerful lever the town has to relieve pressure on residents without cutting services — the difference between a budget balanced on the backs of homeowners and one supported by a healthy, diversified local economy.

This is why the Economic Development Commission frames the moment not as a crisis to be managed, but as an **opportunity to be seized.** Modest, well-placed growth in the commercial tax base can fund services, stabilize the mill rate, and reduce the frequency and severity of the very tax increases residents keep rejecting.

What's possible — without changing who we are

Protecting Somers' character and growing its revenue are not opposing goals; they are complementary. The threat to our character is not thoughtful economic development — it is the slow erosion that comes from repeated budget cuts and the pressure to over-develop residential land in search of tax relief.

Responsible base-broadening means growth that fits Somers: targeted commercial development in appropriate corridors and existing commercial areas; supporting and retaining the local businesses, farms, and services we already have; making it easier for the right businesses to invest here; and pursuing the regional and state economic-development resources available to us. Done deliberately, growth of this kind **strengthens** the rural, residential, and agricultural identity residents cherish — because a town with a healthy tax base does not have to choose between its character and its checkbook.

What's necessary

Balancing Somers' budget over the long term will require three commitments:

1. **Recognizing revenue growth as a core budget strategy**, alongside responsible spending — not as an afterthought.
2. **A deliberate, community-guided economic development plan** that identifies where and how the commercial base can responsibly grow.
3. **Broad engagement** so residents, officials, and businesses build this together — and so “protecting our character” is defined by the community, not left to default.

None of this replaces fiscal discipline; it complements it. But without a revenue strategy, discipline alone leads only to more cuts and more failed referendums.

The bottom line

Somers is a desirable, homeowner-centered community with proven appeal and untapped economic potential. The path to a balanced budget and a viable future is not one more cut, or one more tax increase on residents who have already said no. It is broadening the base that funds our town — carefully, deliberately, and in a way that protects everything we love about Somers.

We do not have a spending problem we can cut our way out of. We have a revenue opportunity we can build our way into.

Prepared by the Town of Somers Economic Development Commission. Data source: CCM Community Profiles (hub.ccm-ct.org); see the companion “Somers vs. Tolland County” benchmarking brief for full figures and rankings.